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**"How potential damage to natural resources of  
Chalkidiki can be minimized whilst maintaining the  
economic benefits of welcoming visitors"**

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I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another's work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student's Handbook.

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## Abstract

Tourism Industry the last years in the most successful, profitable and productive industry in Greece. It is reassuring to have a brand that attracts visitors, investments that help the economy by creating job positions and profits that are more that welcome in country that suffers from economic crisis. On the other hand, the tourism product is totally based on the natural resources. Visitors come in Greece for the beautiful, clean beaches, the unique landscape, to visit the archaeological sites and experience things that cannot be found anywhere in the world. It is really important, in order to preserve your product, which in this case is the Greek nature, to take all the necessary measures in order to keep the image and the quality of the product high.

It is a challenge that next year needs to be won. To attract tourists from all over the world, but at the same time to keep and protect the nature clean, untouched and protected. During this dissertation, I am trying to examine if this can be done in Chalkidiki, a region with rich touristic history. Through my dissertation I am going to examine how in Chalkidiki potential damage to natural resources of Chalkidiki will be minimized whilst maintaining the economic benefits of welcoming visitors. I will search all the ways that this challenge can be achieved, what have been done the recent years in order to move towards to this direction and cases in Chalkidiki that are trying today to achieve this.

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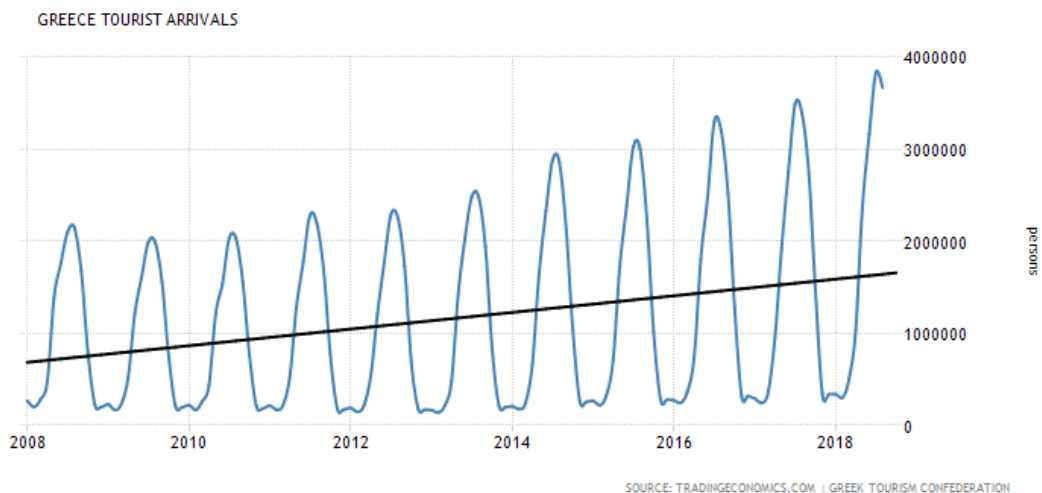
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Tourism industry in Greece

Tourism industry is regarded one of the most profitable and mostly developed industry in Greece. Greece has been struggling with severe economic crisis the past 10 years, however tourism industry has found the way to flourish and make Greece one of the most popular destinations.

According to data taken from web site Trade economics, tourists from abroad in Greece has risen by 8.3 percent year-on-year to 3.673 million in August 2018. Tourist Arrivals in Greece averaged 1.146.869 persons from 2007 until 2018, reaching a record high of 3.832.333 persons in July of 2018 and a record low of 140.107 persons in February of 2013. (<https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/tourist-arrivals>, n.d.)



The graph above shows the increase of tourists' arrival in Greece the last 10 year. It is clear that every year the record breaks.

It is obvious from the predictions so far that the tourists will prefer Greece. It's an unusual feature for a country that four years ago battled with bankruptcy, and escaped euro ejection at the very last minute. Tourism is the heavy industry that has helped to avoid catastrophe.

However, the question that rises is if Greece can handle this sudden increase. Visitors from abroad have increased by two million every year for the past three years. Arrivals from China have been increased dramatically the last years. But with forecasts predicting record numbers over the next decade, a growing number are asking if Greece can really handle that situation. (Helena Smith, 2018)

The Greek environmentalist Nikos Chrysogelos says: "We can't keep having more and more tourists" He claims that a prospect of a new tourist record will cause more than threat "We can't have small islands, with small communities, hosting 1 million tourists over a few months. There's a danger of the infrastructure not being prepared, of it all becoming a huge boomerang if we only focus on numbers and don't look at developing a more sustainable model of tourism." Nikos Zorzos, the mayor of Santorini is more than agreed with that since last year, two million visitors were drawn to the Cycladic isle, have driven Mr.Zorzos to limit cruise-ship passengers disembarking daily up to 8,000 passengers. (Helena Smith, 2018)

Most tourists today are from the new Asian middle class with higher profits, who want to visit the Greek island so as to get married or renew vows by watching the famous sunset, the historical volcano and the significant blue and white houses. The locals consider the blooming of tourism more of a problem, and don't see the advantages of it. Authorities on other side are concerned from the impact that has on the natural resources and infrastructure of the island. Even though, the island is only 76km<sup>2</sup> in size, more than 5.5million overnight stays were recorded in Santorini last year, with consumption levels of energy and water highly increased. (Helena Smith, 2018)

"It's a radical rise and we are forever playing catch-up," Mr.Zorzos claimed. "We have built numerous desalination plants and are in the process of erecting the biggest one in Greece, but in five years' time I worry even that won't be enough." Greece's growing popularity as a global destination comes despite the popularity of Turkey, Egypt and other regional neighbors (Helena Smith, 2018)

On the other hand, tourism sector has been more that beneficial towards Greek economy. The president of SETE Mr. Yiannis Retsos said that since the beginning of the crisis, tourism has created new job opportunities, has helped to reduce unemployment, especially for younger people, and can still support the local family incomes. (Kathimerini, 2017)Greek tourism is regarded as one of the few success stories of a country that came close to bankruptcy during the euro crisis. Industry figures think of foreign visitors as a lifejacket in the hardest of times. Tourism is the nation's biggest foreign currency earner, generating nearly a quarter of its output.

The growth of tourist numbers over the years is also the result of hard work from all the stakeholders involved. Greek officials have done much to improve services and, after decades of focusing on sun, sand and sea holidays, the industry has become more eclectic, diverse and inventive, starting from the season extending.

### 1.1 Tourism industry & climate change

Tourism, like any other industry, can cause serious problems, such as social dislocation, loss of cultural heritage, economic dependence and ecological degradation. After learning about the effects of tourism, many travelers are seeking for more responsible holidays. These holidays include different ways of alternative or sustainable tourism such as: 'nature-based tourism', 'ecotourism' and 'cultural tourism'. Sustainable tourism becomes wildly known that some claim that what we now call 'alternative' will be the 'mainstream' in a few years.

All tourism activities such as holidays, business travel, conferences, adventure travel and ecotourism, need to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism is defined as "tourism that respects both local people and the traveler, cultural heritage and the environment". It wants to provide people with an exciting and educational holiday and at the same time to benefit the people of the host country. (Annabelle Gossein, 2016)

In Greece on the other hand, in 2015, the newly elected Greek government merged the existing environmental ministry with a larger one. This action as a result, raised a number of worries about the future of sustainability. According to the World Wildlife Fund, a number of environmental groups have protested the decision since then. They claimed that the degradation of environmental issues in Greece has been an obstacle for years.(WWF,2015)

It is very positive however, that some socially conscious Greek business owners are starting to recognize the negative impacts from a low interest on environmentalism. Acting more sustainably, should help the economy, as well as improving the health of the country's popularity.

It is very significant to note that there is a very strong relationship between poverty and harm to the environment. According to a report from the European Union, the Greek economic crisis had a negative effect on the environment. The report had some encouraging news, though. The air pollution levels decreased by 40% since 2008. This is because many people stopped driving during leisure activities and reduced consumer activity that has as a result to reduce the shipping of various products. Many people reduced their carbon footprint in some ways, such as traveling less and making fewer purchases. However, there are others that they increased it by a larger degree in other ways. The biggest impact was the burn of wood so as to heat their homes, since that was the only source of heating that they could afford. This action caused harmful fog throughout the country and serious health problems on the population. A similar type of smoke caused the deaths of over 4,000 people in Great Britain in the early 1950s. (Qureshi Annie, 2018)

WWW Hellas, with the National Observatory of Athens, forecasts in its research on climate change in Greece from 2021-2050 a pessimistic view of future for Greece. They warn that if the goal of keeping the rise in temperature to below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels is not achieved, then the consequences will be harmful and dangerous: people in big cities will feel more uncomfortable, with more hot days per year. Other cities will face less rainy days but 10% more thunderstorms. This means more danger of floods and forest fires. (Kitsikopoulos, 2015)

Climate change in Greece will negatively affect the already-damaged economy as the good and warm weather is essential to the growth of the country's tourist industry. The Greek economy depends mostly on tourism. Specialists have urged that if climate change keeps on worsening, the country will not be a popular and tempting tourist destination. There are tourists that like warmth in the day, visitors particularly those from Scandinavian countries, Russia and the UK, who are not used to these conditions, will start to find Greece not that attractive and will book somewhere else. It is urgent for Greece to find out a solution so that it can stay a popular sustainability tourist destination.

The main purpose of this assignment is to examine the case of Chalkidiki and current situation in tourism sector and how in the future tourism sector in Chalkidiki can be profitable but in the same time sustainable.

### 1.3 Chalkidiki



(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalkidiki>, n.d.)

Chalkidiki is a municipality of Greece, part of the Region of Central Macedonia in Northern Greece. The autonomous Mount Athos region constitutes the easternmost part of the peninsula, but not of the regional unit. According to Wikipedia, the capital of Chalkidiki is the main town of Polygyros, located in the center of the peninsula. Chalkidiki has become a famous summer tourist destination (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalkidiki>, n.d.).

Chalkidiki has been a well-known summer tourist destination since the late 1950s when citizens from Thessaloniki started spending their summer holidays in the coastal villages, by renting houses from locals. By the 1960s, tourists from Austria and Germany started to visit Chalkidiki more frequently. During the 1970s, the whole area was full of tourists every summer.

They say that nowhere in Greece there are beaches like those of Chalkidiki. It has the perfect combination of the characteristic Greek light, pure landscapes, unique and unforgettable colors and fragrances. And the perfect natural setting is completed by the rich culinary and the religious traditions of its people.

Mount Athos –known as the Holy Mountain- is the religious capital of the Orthodox Christian community, and is composed of 20 monasteries, 12 skites, and about 700 houses, cells or hermitages and approximately 2,000 monks. The “Garden of Virgin Mary” is the paradise of the eastern peninsula of Chalkidiki. The Monastic State of the Holy Mountain is known to be the main represent of Orthodox Christianity and carries spiritual glory and great history. It is the most well-known religious community, with 1.000 years old monasteries, cells in caves or between the rocks, towers, domes, belfries, chants, etc. It is listed as one of the Unesco’s world heritage monuments. ([www.visit-halkidiki.gr](http://www.visit-halkidiki.gr), 2018)

There is a prohibition that doesn’t allow women inside Mount Athos. This prohibition is called Avaton in Greek. Even though women are not allowed, all visitors (men and women) can admire the monasteries by cruising around the sea. Daily Boat Cruises, depart from Ouranoupoli (East Coast) and Ormos Panagias (Sithonia). Mt Athos is dedicated to one woman whom all the monks honor and pray to, the Blessed Mary. ([www.visit-halkidiki.gr](http://www.visit-halkidiki.gr), 2018)



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Tourism in Chalkidiki today

Tourism industry in Chalkidiki started to flourish during 1980-1990. The combination of sunny days throughout the year with the 54 EU Blue Flag awards for the clean waters of its beaches, which are more than any other Greek region, make Chalkidiki an ideal choice as a holiday destination. During that period there was an increase in hotels constructions and number of incoming guests increased by 100%.

The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTTO), is the governmental department for the promotion of tourism in Greece. It functions under the supervision of the Ministry for Culture and Tourism and was founded in 1927 with the aim of promoting tourism in Greece.

In early 60's, Chalkidiki was known mostly to campers that used to camp in the area of Kassandra, since beaches were far away from Thessaloniki, so as locals to go for short vacations. However it was getting more popular as the years pass by and GNTTO decided to take advantage of lands in the area and start the construction of big hotels, with many amenities, closer to the sea, much brighter, which was in contrast to the traditional motels that used to exist in the area by then. During the 70's, when the tourism started to grow rapidly, the whole region was full of European tourists, including those coming from countries close to the northern borders of Greece that could access the region by automobiles. (Nana Boussia, 2017)

During 80's, along with Greece's development, many big hotels were constructed. Most of them have more than 300 rooms and could accommodate many tourists, mostly families, either from Greece or abroad. Hotels were all inclusive, they could offer apart from accommodation, restaurants, and sport areas, swimming pools for sports, adults and kids. This kind of all-inclusive hotels, was very popular during 90's, not only in Thessaloniki but in other areas of Greece, too.

Investors and GNTTO keep buying large amounts of land and built large hotels, in order to take advantage of Chalkidiki's popularity. This had as a result the hotels in the area to increase by 100%. Chalkidiki was a popular destination for a few more years and was attracting people from abroad, Europe and USA, and from Greece. By that time Greeks were in good economic situation and preferred expensive hotels during their summer holidays. (Skandalakis, 2017)

### 2.2 Decline in tourism revenue

However, after the Olympic Games in 2004, the first signs of economic crisis started to appear globally. As a result, tourism industry was affected. Numbers of tourists mostly from European countries in Chalkidiki were reduced. Most tourists that visit Chalkidiki are from Russia.

Chalkidiki has invested in tourists from Russia, and over the years despite the general economic crisis, Russian preferred Chalkidiki. Also, apart from Russians, there was an increase in tourists from Balkan countries, mostly from Serbia, Skopje and Bulgaria. However, over the years it is obvious that people coming from Europe are affected from economic crisis and the total revenues from them are really low.

According to local businessmen in the region, they have realized that the damage that Chalkidiki has suffered in recent years is difficult to reverse, mainly

because the region has "abandoned" its traditional customers from the West. Europe (Germany, Britain, etc.) and "surrendered" to the Russians, Serbs, Skopje and Bulgarian tourists. They mention that they couldn't cope with some difficult times and are unconditionally surrendered to the easy solution, which in the past was visitors from the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Union. As a result there was a deterioration of both the tourist product and the physiognomy of the region. However all of this would not have been of any particular value if the economic result was positive. In the decades that Chalkidiki was converted into a touristic and residential area of a second residence, there was economic development. The land gained great value, entrepreneurship grew, employment was boosted, and poverty was overcome. Today, the opposite happens. Along with the general crisis in Greece, businesses in Chalkidiki are declining and tourism is downgrading. (Mitrakis, 2016)

In contrary to what is happening in the most important resorts on the planet - and in many cases in Greece - that they try to keep their character and maintain their natural resources on a long-term horizon, it seems that for Chalkidiki was very easy to surrender and change the areas identity . It is very important to mention that the last two years, the region's businessmen (hoteliers, professionals, and local authorities) are trying to "return" to the mature markets of Central and Northern Europe, since this is very important for their profitability. Firstly, because of the bad economic condition, Balkan countries cannot support Greek tourism and increase revenues in Chalkidiki's touristic areas. On the one hand, because of the crisis in Russia and the decrease in the number of visitors from there. (Mitrakis, 2016)

Russia, on the other side, used to be the main contributor to Chalkidiki's tourism development. Over the years many Russians, has bought landscapes in Chalkidiki in order to invest in the area by building hotels. However the last few years, incoming tourists from Chalkidiki has dropped down. One reason that happened is the economic crisis that has affected Russia. Russian ruble has fallen against euro and during August of 2018 fell to 69.40 against the dollar on Aug. 13, its lowest level in two years, pulled down by a combination of the threat of new U.S. sanctions and the collapse of the Turkish lira, according to Moscow Times. This had as a result, Russians to prefer to spend more time in their country , because of their bad economic situation and at the same time to help and support their country.

The rift between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church, after the former recognized the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, has had a negative impact on religious tourism to Greece. According to information from representatives of religious tourism offices and groups, the number of visitors from Russia to Mount Athos in Macedonia, the holy mountain for 300 million Orthodox Christians, as well as other destinations in Greece has seen a dramatic fall over the past days as many tourists have cancelled their pilgrimages to these sites. According to romfea.gr, a rising number of visitors, families, and groups from Russia who had planned to visit primarily religious destinations in Greece cancelled their trips. This follows the interruption of communion between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Russia after the Patriarchate, seated in Constantinople recognized the Ukrainian Church's right to be split from Moscow and have an autocephalous national church. Russians visitors make up 60% of the pilgrims in the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece, according to data from the

press service of Rosturizm and the Greek Ministry of Tourism. According to data, Russian tourists to Greece amounted to over 800,000 last year, with the aim for the next season of reaching 1 million, receiving a serious setback after the developments. (www.protothema.gr, 2018)

### 2.3 Chalkidiki towards a profitable tourism

It is really important for Chalkidiki now, more than ever, after the crisis to introduce a new, more innovative development strategy. Chalkidiki is a vital, multidimensional and productive region, whose advantages have been disregarded or degraded. Therefore, any future development model should be carefully designed targeting to sustainable and inclusive development using as many as possible environmental, cultural and economic resources.

The requirement for such a plan is the cooperation of all the stakeholders involved in tourism sector. The collaboration of all local sectors, private and public, in combination with the proper education from schools will lead to a successful development strategy. (Carvalho, 2017)

It is concluded that the factors that will boost Chalkidiki's tourism development in the future include first of all upgrading the quality of the tourism product to compete against destinations such as Egypt and Turkey, and try to attract tourists for more well-economic countries. Chalkidiki is a wonderful region, with a lot of natural beauty, however, as the years pass by has lost many tourists. It is obvious, that something has change and it is vital for Chalkidiki to find the problem and then the solution in order to have a profitable development.

Apart from that, in order to expand the touristic season, the options for tourists should be more expanded. That's why people in Chalkidiki are trying to invest to new forms of tourism that suit to each area and at the same time they will starting the tourism season earlier in the year.

#### ➤ *Medical Tourism*

The last years, not only in our country but worldwide too, a new different approach to tourism has begun to rise. Nowadays many patients prefer to visit a country which combines holidays and medical care. The climate of Greece is regarded from all as ideal and the high level of medical services that are offered in our country, are sufficient requirements to meet the needs for medical tourism and as a result make Chalkidiki an ideal destination.

To be more specific, in Kassandra, there are the hot thermal spas of Agia Paraskeyi. The spas are about 120 km from the city of Thessaloniki and they are fully equipped and provide to their costumers all the amenities, such as inside and outside pool with thermal seawater, sauna, jacuzzi, massage, physical therapy and more. Tourists can relax at these spas, forgetting their worries. The hot spas help in the treatment of many diseases related to bones, joints and muscles. Moreover, this kind of spas helps to the treatment of many forms of arthritis, skin diseases, gynecological and urological problems, cervical syndrome. (Halkidiki Travel, n.d.)

#### ➤ *Religious Tourism*

Pilgrims of the world know of the few places that can provide lifetime experiences. Chalkidiki is one of the ideal destinations for an authentic, timeless

religious trip. The easternmost peninsula boasts ancient monasteries, some hanging off of cliffs over gorges, fortified to look like castles, while others stand further below, near the sea. Visitors can admire ecclesiastic architecture and art, fine mosaics, wonderful paintings and icons, all testifying to the Christian faith and tradition. Thousands of travelers visit Chalkidiki every year not only to visit the numerous historic churches scattered across the peninsula, but to also make a pilgrimage to the majestic monastic state of Mt Athos or "Agio Oros" (Holy Mountain), as the locals call it. Its existence counts since 1054 and it has been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. (Mountain, 2017)

### ➤ *Wine Tourism*

In Northern Greece there are some of the most historical vineyards in Greece. At the same time, the vineyards of Northern Greece are known for the huge amounts of wine they produce. Wine tourism in Northern Greece is definitely much more organized than in any other part of Greece and that is because to the Wines of North Greece organization, which has designed the Wine Roads of Northern Greece.

In Chalkidiki there is great potential for wine tourism throughout the year so as to satisfy all of the desires and needs of visitors. Wine tourism in Northern Greece is greatly supported by the Egnatia Odos national road, which connects Northern Greece from end to end and provides fast and safe road travel. The Wine Roads of Northern Greece include eight routes which begin in the west, from the Epirus Region and the Wine Route of Epirus. They continue through the central section of the Macedonia region and continue through the Region of Western Macedonia.

It is obvious that travelers that wish to experience the wine tourism in Macedonia will learn and enjoy to the most this life experience.

It is important to mention that the current mayor of Thessaloniki Mr. Yiannis Boutaris is also one of the most famous wine producer not only in Macedonia, but in Greece too. He has helped a lot to promote the wine tourism in the region of Macedonia. (Montefiore, 2018)

### ➤ *Ecotourism*

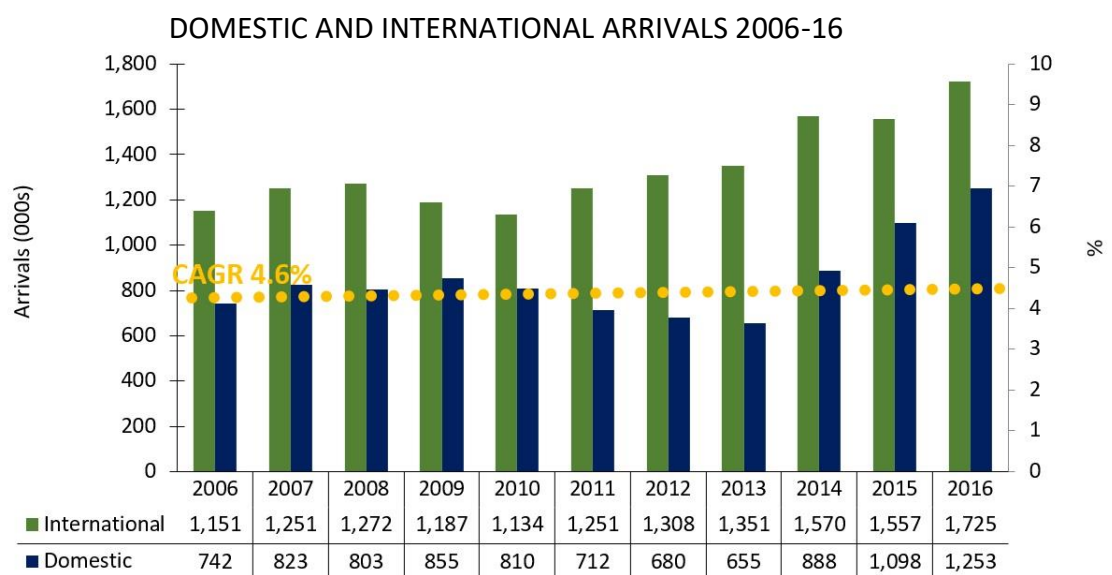
During recent years, Chalkidiki, have revealed a more environmentally friendly kind of tourism, as the large hotels and hotel have begun implementing green programs and strategies. Many gorgeous boutique hotels and charming stone-built family have sprung up as well, opening Macedonian hospitality to individual tourists and wanderers like never before. Tourists will have the chance to visit traditional villages, dive in some of the world's cleanest beaches, hike around the mountain routes, sail around hidden coasts and experience Chalkidiki's spiritual power.

Some of the must-see traditional villages include Parthenonas, Athytos and Arnea. Nature lovers can rejoice in Chalkidiki: there are 20 walking routes to discover the rich natural flora and fauna of the region. Trekking through Mount Itamos is highly recommended to marvel at its pine trees and at the view of Sithonia, Cassandra and Mount Athos. For rock climbing, abseiling and great bouldering right above the shore, head to Loutra on a climbing journey that will take you as high as 100 meters. To really feel the land head to some of the farms that produce fresh

products and get close to the animals, from making tsipouro liqueur and picking fruits to learning about olive oil.

For beach lovers, on the other hand, Chalkidiki is heaven with the longest shoreline in Greece. It has more beaches than anyone can count, and many of these are designated with the Blue Flag, i.e. are among the cleanest in the world. (<https://ecotourism-greece.com/subdestination/halkidiki/>, n.d.)

Another factor towards a profitable tourism sector, that needs to be written is the renovation of the Macedonia International Airport. The last two years it has been bought by the German contraction company “Fraport” along with other Greek airports, and is being totally renovated. So it is really important to take advantage of the new constructed airport “Macedonia”, in order to increase tourism income. Upgrade works are accelerating day by day, demonstrating, in the meantime, a remarkable increase regarding its passenger statistics. According to Civil Aviation Authority’s data, the airport recorded 515,177 passengers in May, continuing a dynamic streak for 2017. According to the graph below, from Hellenic Statistical Authority, which shows the arrivals in Macedonia Airport from 2006 to 2016, the numbers of visitors from abroad shows an increase over the years.



Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

(Nana Boussia, 2017)

The figures are truly encouraging as for this year to date, 2,134,231 passengers have been transported, representing a 10% increase or 205,307 more passengers compared to 2016. Departures and arrivals are also indicative of the airport’s increasing traffic; from 12,690 last years (January to April), 17,848 have been recorded for the same period in 2017. This emerging reality, is very promising for major touristic resorts and destinations in the region of Central Macedonia, namely Chalkidiki and Vergina.

If the new airport management follows smart growth policies, this could bring more tourist exchange and create even brighter prospects for the city’s business environment and the local economy in general.

The extension of the existing runway, allowing the landing of larger aircrafts will make the airport more appealing to the most profitable markets such as those of Southeastern Asia or America with the introduction of direct flights. The airport facilities' expansion, that started during the beginning of 2018 and are probably going to be completed in 2020, is expected to give a significant boost in the city's touristic development. (Karagiannis, 2018)

The plans of Fraport conjecture that by 2020 Thessaloniki will have one of the best airports in Southern Europe, expecting a rise in passenger traffic by 48% by 2026, introducing a new page for tourism in the city and the Macedonia region. The airport size will be doubled, with the space of the terminal station expanding from 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> to 57,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Check-in stations will rise by 47%, baggage zones rising by 75%, the number of gates will rise 50% and security zones in the airport are expected to be doubled. (Nana Boussia, 2017)

Last, but not least the last years , many investments have been made in touristic regions, in order to increase profitability .The tourism popularity of the northern Greece region of Chalkidiki has attracted investors who have placed over 300 million euros in hospitality projects over the last five years. According to a report by Greek newspaper Ethnos, these projects include hotel revamps, new resorts that will open their doors this year and others that will operate in the next two years.

One of most expected openings during summer is the new five-star, 136-room Sani Dunes, a 24.2-million-euro addition to the multi-awarded Sani Resort group's roster that is going to be accessible to adults and children over 12 in June. During summer, another hotel that will open its doors to the public is the Tor Hotel Group-owned Eagles Villas that has 42 villas and a view towards the Mt Athos peninsula. Some of the recently renovated units that will welcome guests this year and are ready to offer the latest and finest in hospitality are the Miraggio Thermal Spa Resort at Paliouri, the Ikos Oceania at Nea Moudania, the Ekies hotel at Vourvourou, the Danai Resort & Villas in Nikiti and the fully renovated Portes Beach at the beach of Agios Mamas. A 50-million-euro Mentekidis-owned business at Agios Ioannis, and a 200 room Lagoon Princess Group, only for adults, facility at Kalyves are expected to open during the summer season. According to Ethnos, more than 500 hotels (25 of which are five-star units and 40 are four-star) and 2,000 room rental businesses operate in Chalkidiki. Meanwhile, Mouzenidis Group is planning to open the Enigma Mall near Nea Moudania with 38 shops selling luxury items as well as select Greek products aiming to attract travelers. The shopping center will initially run for six months a year with plans to continue operation as an e-shop the rest of the year. (GTP, 2017)

#### **2.4 Chalkidiki towards a sustainable tourism**

Chalkidiki is an important tourism destination that needs to cope with the current challenges of sustainable tourism development. Chalkidiki Tourism Organization firmly believes that all tourism activities of whatever motivation need to be sustainable. So want its locals and travelers to appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of the region, respecting its environment and local communities. In order to achieve that goal, has started to promote a new form of tourism based on what is needed so as to balance economic viability, environmental conservation and

social impacts. Chalkidiki Tourism Organization has invested to constant education, increase of the awareness and has tried to engage the hoteliers, the local community and generally all the stakeholders in the tourism industry in order to accomplish a more sufficient sustainable development.

Chalkidiki is one of the leading destinations in Greece with 89 beaches and 3 marinas awarded with the “blue flags” for the coastal environment, water quality, safety and access for all. According to Halkidiki Tourism Organization the Blue Flag is a voluntary eco-label awarded to over 4266 beaches, marinas and sustainable boating tourism operators in 49 countries all over the world. The Blue Flag Program is owned and run by the independent non-profit organization Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). The Blue Flag aims to a sustainable development at beaches and marinas through strict criteria dealing mostly with water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, and safety and other services. The Blue Flag Program includes environmental education for all the stakeholders involved in the tourism industry. (HTO, 2017)

Apart from her beautiful coast line, Chalkidiki is full of the natural landscapes, which are being protected as Natural Beauty and Biodiversity area by Natura European Network. The areas under protection include forests and wetlands with flora and fauna. The tourists can find paths for mountain biking and walking that cut their way through the forests. Moreover, a variety of other activities like bird watching, canoe, horse riding, makes Chalkidiki home to many earthly paradises for those who love nature. For this reason Chalkidiki Tourism Organization has a strong commitment to preserve and maintain the region’s environment and heritage. Natura 2000 is the milestone of EU nature & biodiversity policy. The network’s purpose is to protect Europe’s most precious and threatened species and habitats. It consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and also integrates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (HTO, 2017).

### 3. Cases of sustainable tourism in Chalkidiki

After carefully examination of all the measures that have taken so far, in order to achieve a profitable, but yet sustainable tourism in Chalkidiki, through this dissertation I will examine if the most popular hotels are heading towards this way. The hotels that will be examined through my dissertation are **Sani Resort, Grecotel Pella Beach and Eagles Palace Chalkidiki**. My purpose is to check if the hotels mentioned, are focusing on environment protection, apart from their interest to profitability.

#### ➤ *Sani Resort*

The first hotel to be examined is Sani Resort, which is located in Kassandra Chalkidiki and according to their web site is a very unusual place where nature and human can co exist in harmony. It is a characterized as a family-oriented, ecological region stretching across 1,000 acres, with endless golden beaches enchantingly framed by the crystal clear waters of the Aegean and the magnificent pine forests of the Kassandra peninsula. Most of the information that I gathered through my research are from Sani Resort’s sustainability report of 2017.

According to the official website, the company is aiming to preserve this beautiful environment and support the local community, while providing an



excellent quality experience for its guests in all five luxury Sani properties. One of the firsts detail that we obtain from the last sustainability report is that Sani Resort has reduced energy consumption by 4,7% from 2016 , and has increased the recycling rate by almost 50% . We are also informed by the report that almost 1.000.000 kg of materials has been recycled the last 3 years. Last but not least, water consumption has been reduced by 36%, and it is really important to mention that recycled water is used for gardens watering.

Moreover to all the data above, Sani Resort has banned the use of plastic bags and also the use of plastic straws. Sani Resort has reduced the plastic use at the facilities by 15% since 2015.

Apart from natural's environment, Sani Resort is focusing on the improvement of the community around the hotel. Almost 71% of the staff is Greek and more that 56% of the products used are Greek. By that they are trying to support local community. At the same time Sani Resort has helped in forest protection and helped through Sani Animal Rescue 24 animals the last year.

As for the energy consumption, the goal for the next year is to reduce the total consumption by 2%. Another goal to be achieved is to reduce water consumption by 2% by installing water restrictions where necessary. According to the report, the hotel wants to control waste management, and increase recycling rate by 3%, through proper staff training. Another goal is to increase local suppliers by 3%. The plan to achieve it is to evaluate more local suppliers. Another important target for the future is to continue the sustainable training and deliver 3 hours of training per person through induction or via on the job training.

All the information above that was used as data was from financial year 2017 (April 2017 –October 2017), where the hotels operates.

#### ➤ ***Grecotel Pella Beach***

Grecotel Pella Beach, according to its official web site, recognizes the value of protecting the environment, and how important role has to the sustainable development of tourism. Therefore, the resort implements Environmental Management System procedures in order to minimize and manage its environmental impact.

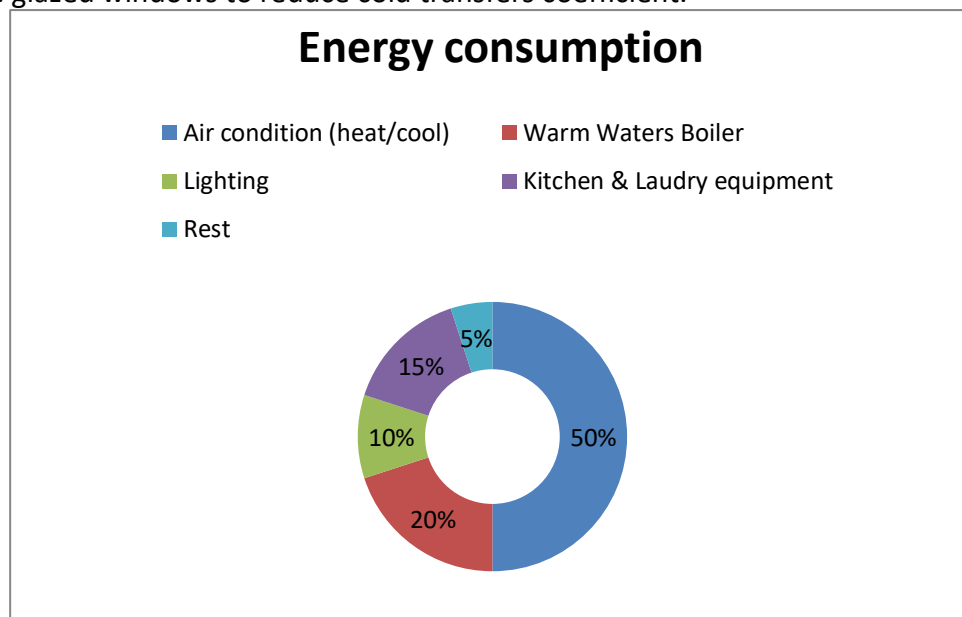
The organization of the hotel understands that the integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions is the key to achieve the sustainable development and all the dimensions are equally important for hotel's progress. According to the sustainable report of 2017, as for the sustainability development, during 2017 the hotel managed to reduce energy consumption by 12.000KWH. Also 8.300 Kg of waste was recycled.

The last years Grecotel performs eco-auditing in its hotels, and based on the findings, they made improvements to the following fields: waste management, water and energy saving, pollution control, composting, sustainable coastal management, environmental friendly purchasing policy.

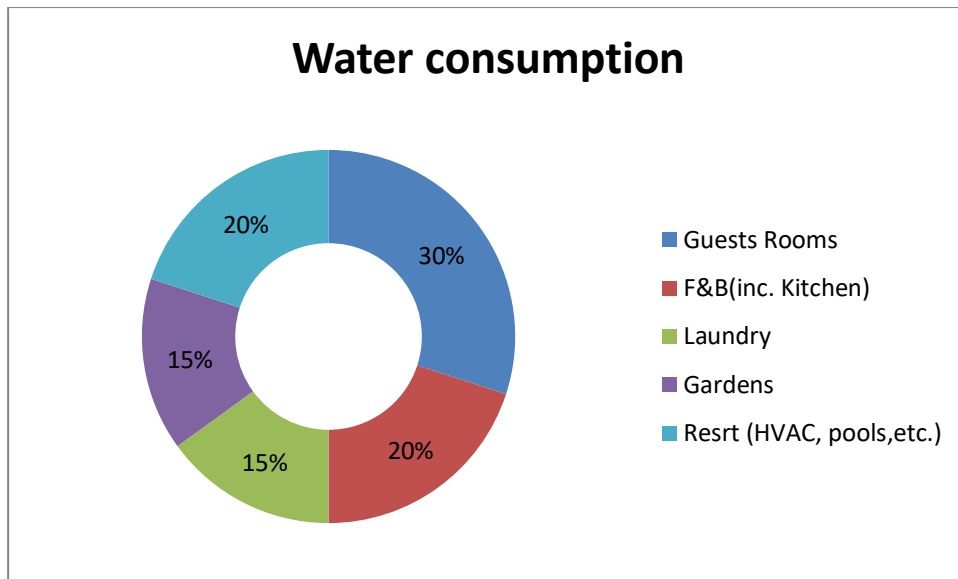
Apart from inside-hotel actions that Grecotel does in order to protect the environment, they protect the outside the hotel environment. Grecotel beaches are awarded with Blue Flags and they run programs that protect wildlife and natural reserves. Also, through leaflets, booklets, workshops and seminars they are trying to succeed environmental awareness of customers and employees.



Direct and indirect GHG is the main contributors of energy consumption, so according to the sustainability report of 2017 Grecotel with the help of the technology; they maximize the use of renewable energy and reduce energy consumption. Some of the measures taken are: installation of energy efficient window panels, and low energy technology lighting and central lighting control systems. Also include a high quality, external wall insulation system that reduces energy losses by wrapping the building in a thermally resistant envelope. They are trying to save energy from lighting, from cooling and from equipment. As we can see from the graph below, according to report's data, 50% of the energy consumed is for the air condition. In order to save energy from air condition, hotel's managers have decided to use natural cooling techniques ,increase maintenance in order to increase efficiency and have replaced window frames that form a cold bridge and install double glazed windows to reduce cold transfers coefficient.



It is more than known that available water resources, are directly linked with sustainable tourism development .Based on the sustainability report of 2017, the firsts steps to measure water use and set tangible targets, then identify, evaluate and select efficiency measures and then implement and monitor them. Some of the measures taken are about bathrooms, by making a better maintenance. Also laundry, by running the washing machine only with full load, and checking regularly for leaking, and by using the correct amount of soap. Swimming pools can increase fresh water consumption by 10%, so it is necessary to take steps that don't help water wasting. So in Grecotel, they conduct regular maintenance so as to prevent any leaks and backwash the swimming pool every two to three days, instead of daily. Last but not least, they promote customers participation and try to awaken them and encourage them to reduce water consumption.

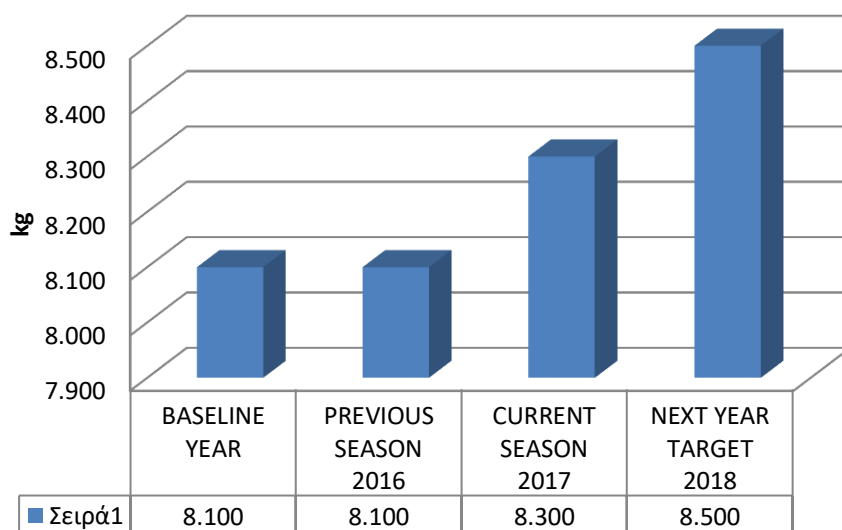
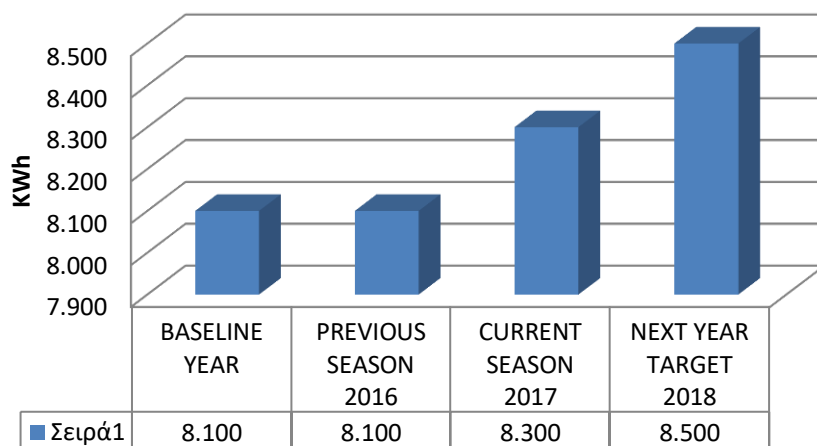


In Pella Beach Hotel they understand the importance of waste management and its effect on the environment, so they are focusing on minimizing waste production by introducing reduction and recycling techniques at every stage of their operation. They recycle glass, plastic, papers, lamps and electrical devices. They separate waste according to authority guidance and they return glass bottles for water, beer, soft drinks, wine, plastic water bottles. Also they are trying to control pollution of natural resources by running chemical and microbiological analyses of water and make sure that all cleaning agents and detergents are selected according to environmentally friendly standards. They have implemented HACCP and the ISO22000 food and hygiene safety management system.

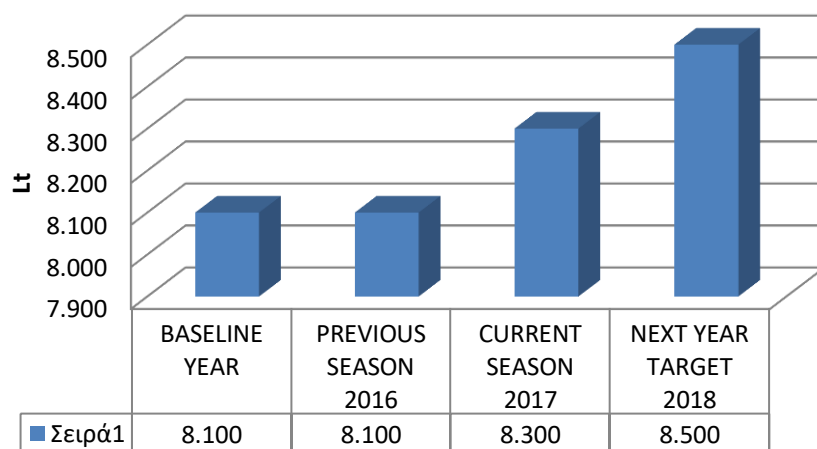
As for the future goals, according to the sustainability report of 2017, one primary goal is to reduce the energy consumption by 2% and to overview the energy saving methods. One other goal is to replace gradually all the olds taps and showers in rooms and communal toilets with new ones and old washing machines with new ones, so as to control flow reduction, and increase the use of energy-saving lamps in common areas. Moreover, one goal for the next year is to do research from more environmental friendly cleaning chemicals. They also aim at better training to all the employees regarding energy efficient and send environmental questionnaire to all the suppliers.

On the graphs below, we can see the annual recycling records, the annual energy consumption and the annual water consumption as well as the goals for all these for 2018.

## Total Annual Energy Consumption



## Annual Water Consumption



➤ *Eagles Palace Halkidiki*

According to hotels official website, Eagles Palace Halkidiki is characterized as one of the few Eco-friendly hotels that operate in Greece. According to the official web site, one of the most important elements that make the hotel so unique is its surroundings.

The measures that have been taken so as to make Eagles Palace eco-friendly hotel, based on hotel's official website, are for start to change lighting bulbs in common areas with new ones, with low energy consumption. Also to install master electricity switch in all rooms, hot and cold water pipe insulation. They separate waste depended on its category (metal, plastic and paper) and they recycle battery, too. Liquid soap dispensers have been installed too, in public area toilets and showers, and there is a continuous filtering of pool water and regular monitoring of the water quality. The hotel has been awarded with Green Key certification in 2010.

It should be mentioned that according to hotel's website, Eagles Palace is awarded with Blue Flag for the clean sea. They also try to protect the nests of emigrating birds, and they are putting labels with the name of the plants, they organize cleaning campaigns with the help of primary school students of the region.

After careful examination of hotel activities and evaluation of the findings from Sustainability reports, I came up with some conclusions. First of all, it is very clear to every observer that Sani Resort and Grecotel Pella Beach try to make an excellent work when it comes to sustainable tourism. That conclusion is not just a result of successful marketing strategy that they follow, but it is coming from reading their sustainability reports. It is very clear, with numbers and data that they are working toward a sustainable development that will help them gain more profit at the same time. In my opinion, the managers from Sani Resort, as well as from Grecotel, have understand that as the years pass by guests become more environmentally conscious and they want to live that way on their vacation too. So it is vital for hotel's profitability to try to keep and satisfy that target group. Both of these hotels are trying with specific steps to reduce energy and energy consumption, to increase recycling rates and try to aware the customers and the employees.

On the other side, I try to find data and things that Eagles Palace Halkidiki does for the environment. Although it is a five star hotel, like the other two, it does not publish Sustainability Report. The only information I could gain was for the official site, since hotel is closed for winter period and the manager was not available. Although we can see the actions that hotel does, in order to be environmental friendly there are no data so as to see the progress over the year. To sum up, at the official web site the hotel is referred as an ecofriendly hotel, but contrary to the other two hotels examined, don't have what it needs so as to be a hotel that practically cares about the environment.

#### 4. Ways Chalkidiki will have profits in economic sector again

According to the of PWC “Greek Tourism-The next day” , 35 % of Greece tourists come from 4 countries from European Union countries and the biggest demand is about 5 destinations. It also comes from the results, that in order Greece to gain more from tourists needs to upgrade the existing hotels, to develop less preferred touristic areas so as to give tourists more options and decongest the most popular destinations like Mykonos and Santorini. Tourism in the main source of income for Greek economy, so it is a vital factor in country’s economy. For this reason, it is really important to reevaluate tourism strategy, so as to increase its value.

Chalkidiki is one of the areas in Greece that needs to increase the tourist revenues. One first step to achieve this is if we have cooperation between authorities like GNTTO and Chalkidiki Tourism Association, and tour operators from abroad. Usually each tour operator specializes in different travel market. It is really vital to develop partnerships with the proper agents , that can have a positive impact by introducing the destination to more travelers. For instance, there are many tour operators that target a specific travel market. Chinese travelers will prefer one, while Indian travelers will probably prefer to book their tours and activities through an operator that is specialized to their market, since that makes them feel safe. Moreover, tour and activity operators that cooperate with agents who are specialized with specific outbound markets will help to increase visitors in Chalkidiki. In order to increase the visitors, Chalkidiki should focus on tour operators that cooperate with pilgrims and religious tourism, or with operators that focus on alternative tourism and are interested in more ecofriendly destinations.

It is really important to mention that travel is an experience based on personal objective. It is inevitable that every person is going to experience the same vacation in different way, whether that is about food or local cuisine, or comfort and relaxation, or adventure. All visitors value different aspects of a tourist destination differently. For tourist-oriented businesses or organizations, video plays a vital part in communicating those experiences to the future guests.

Online marketing for tourism and travel is now taking the next step using video marketing. When the video marketing is used appropriately, it will result in attracting more guests. This strategy has a remarkable growth in our days. Videos are an appealing and fun way that are used by many visitors from all over the world who look for related information for their next vacation. (Torres, 2016)

In cooperation with GNTTO, Chalkidiki can create videos and promote them through different tourist web sites, upload them on “Visit-Halkidiki” web site or on “Discover-Greece” website, which the two most famous websites that promote Chalkidiki. A good and smart video can increase traffic to the websites, can appear in Google search results and finally it is possible that will help to develop better sales opportunities.

According to Google study “The Travelers Road to Decision” YouTube is the most preferable site in order to search vacation videos. The research shows that 81% of the YouTube users look for business travel options and 79% search information for personal travels. It comes from the research that potential travelers tend to look for online videos to lead them to a decision. On the other hand, many travelers create reviews and upload their own travel videos online. As it is said “An image worths a

thousand words” and online destination or online hotel videos can help gain even more visitors and result in an increase of the profits. Visibility is an important element for the travel industry, because travelers today demand more from the on line services, through which they will finally realize their travel experience.

As it seems, it is very important GNTTO and Chalkidiki Tourism Association to invest in a strong and efficient marketing strategy by creating advertising videos that will make people want to come and see Chalkidiki and its beauty.

Chalkidiki needs to try to open up to new kind of tourists, in order to increase the profits in the sector. It is obvious that a proper promotion strategy is needed so as to achieve this goal. It is also necessary to use different marketing channels, based on each kind of tourism that wants to advertise. For example, in order to advertise religious tourism it is better to do it through websites that are more appealing to pilgrims, or tour agencies that are specializing in this kind of tourism. On the other side, for ecotourism, can use YouTube or come in touch with well-known traveler, and promote the alternative side of Chalkidiki through their blogs. As it was mentioned before, it is vital for profits increase , to cooperate with different tour agencies in Europe, or in United States, build a strong relationship and promote Chalkidiki depended on each market needs.

Chalkidiki can be described as a family oriented destination. It has beaches that can suit to family needs with clear beaches and huge areas for activities. Apart from that the latest years you can find in Chalkidiki, large all inclusive hotels like Ikos Oceana, Ikos Olivia and Blue Lagoon Princes. These hotels have many rooms, as well as five or six sometimes different restaurants, areas for sports (football, basketball etc.), gyms and swimming pools. Also, they have expert staff that can arrange special, customized events, transfers from one place to another and even can provide babysitting services. These kinds of hotels are more than ideal and suitable for families that want to spend some quality time, without worry about anything.

For all these reasons, it is very important to promote that kind of hotels and the services they offer, to the proper market group. A good and efficient marketing strategy can influence many travelers with children and make them take the decision to visit Chalkidiki.

Apart from all inclusive hotels, Chalkidiki’s local tour agencies can attract families by creating and promoting family events and activities. Tourists from abroad are really interested in organized tours and especially to those that can be attended by the whole family and spend time together by doing something interesting. Some of the activities that will attract families are cooking classes, where the whole family can help to prepare a Greek meal and then enjoy it. Another activity for families is hiking, or visiting local farms where they can see the life there and even have the chance to ride horses along with the help of a professional instructor. It would be really interesting if those tours and activities where in combination with accommodation, in special price. It would more convenient for a visitor when he books his accommodation, to see the extra activities and book them together with the accommodation in a better price.

In Chalkidiki there are many big hotels, some of them have more than a hundred rooms. That fact makes Chalkidiki an ideal destination so as to accommodate big groups of tourists. Hotels in most of the famous islands, and well

known touristic destinations – like Mykonos, Santorini, cannot accommodate more than forty or fifty guests. That fact makes Chalkidiki an ideal destination for big groups that want to visit Greece, or even for conferences that need many rooms and classrooms in order to take place.

Each destination has some characteristics that make it differ from other destinations. In Chalkidiki's case, are the unique, clean beaches with crystal waters, the combination of mountains, forests with the beaches, as well as the great gastronomy. In order to build a strong marketing strategy that will raise the number of visitors, it is absolutely necessary to invest in all those characteristics that make the region different. All those responsible for the marketing strategy should take these facts into account and promote them accordingly.

It seems so far, that a lot of things should be done in order Chalkidiki to attract more visitors that will lead to increase the revenues from tourism sector. In order to estimate the progress, should take very seriously the reviews from the visitor. Nowadays, Internet has made it extremely easy for someone to express his opinion about a region and if there was something that pleases him or not. The power of word of mouth is really valuable now days, as those one with really experience and opinion are more reliable.

## **5. How Chalkidiki will reduce environmental impact on Tourism sector**

In Greece, tourism is the one of the most fruitful sector and contributes an annual 16% to the national GDP. During the last ten years its growth has risen rapidly. According to the World Tourism Organization, in 2007 Greece welcomed 18.754.593 visitors, and that has as a result to be ranked in 15<sup>th</sup> position globally. However, tourism development is not referring only to numbers. For the last years, holiday infrastructure development has resulted to the loss of Greece's vital tourism product: its natural capital. Tourism culture that was expanded mainly along the coastline and on the islands, illegal and unreasonable land development and constructions even within sites of great ecological importance are the most crucial issues. Their effect today is more than distinct. Some of the impacts of human uncontrolled behavior are the loss of exclusively beautiful landscapes and ecological gems that should have been preserved and promoted as the "diamonds" for tourism in Greece.

The Mediterranean and Greece more specifically, have suffered the last years from the results of rampant and sometimes unauthorized tourism development. The countryside of Greece has an abundance of hotels for all preferences. On the other hand, there are too many indifferent hotels for tourists who seek for value-for-money experiences, which maintain high quality. New tourist towns have risen up, but are deserted and isolated during the off season period or if something new appears. Well-known touristic destinations in Greece, lack proper planning and the necessary environmental infrastructures, like sustainable waste management systems and access to freshwater resources.

Authorities should be very careful during choosing a strategy policy. The point in a sustainable tourism planning is to gain profit, but protecting the environment and protect the natural resources for the next generations.

Previous in the dissertation, it was mentioned extensively what two big 5 stars hotel do in order to be more sustainable. More hotels should follow that

example if they don't already do. Any hotel in the region of Chalkidiki can start be sustainable and more environmental friendly by adopting more "green" procedures. Sani Resort stop using plastic bags, and plastic straws and these are some actions that every hotel should do. In order to have a sustainable tourism in Chalkidiki, all the factors involved in tourism sector should try and contribute so as to achieve this goal. Hotels are a huge part of tourism industry and if they start having a green policy, it is more that sure that other sectors will follow their example.

It well-know that now days ecotourism is the new tourism model that gains more fans each year, and has become a very popular way of travelling. Today however, compared to the majority, they are a significantly small part of travelers. With the increasing concerns about the effects that tourism has on the environment though, ecotourism will probably attain its rising trend for 2018 and the years following.

Ecotourism "maximizes the benefits of local communities and at the same time minimizes the negative social or environmental impacts, and try to help the local people to conserve the fragile cultures and habitats or species". (The International Ecotourism Society, TIES, [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)). Ecotourism can give the travelers the opportunity to gain something more from their trip, apart from souvenirs. Instead of just visiting the area and doing things for themselves, they can actually make a difference. By acting that way, people return from holiday knowing that they had a positive influence at the area they visit.

It is well known that via ecotourism has been given a better image at tourism. For all the reasons mentioned above, it is vital for Chalkidiki's sustainability to promote ecotourism and attract the tourists who are environmentally conscious and are seeking for more unique experiences. From what we have seen so far, it is obvious that the growth of ecotourism will not curb during 2018, and authorities should keep on promoting the benefits so as to maintain all the natural resources, that are vital for our future on this planet.

Agro tourism is also a new form of tourism, and similar to ecotourism. Ecotourism holidays is a new-born form of tourism in Greece, and hasn't developed yet, even though the country has many hectares of land and production of many local products. Agro tourism holidays in Greece can offer to tourists an accurate and deep understanding in ecology, farming, gastronomy and local customs of the country. Agro tourism can offer the chance to visitors that come to get in touch with the Greek nature and be part of an authentic village community, away from city noises. (Grigory, 2017)

It is a perfect chance for Chalkidiki to specialize to this kind of tourism and offer to visitors unique experiences. Visitors to agro tourist farms will have the opportunity to get an insight of the agricultural activities and can volunteer if they wish to. Tourists that mostly live in cities will love this new experience.

Moreover, autumn is the period where most agricultural works are done in Greece. This is when people deal with agriculture activities, like harvest the olives and produce the olive oil. Some make wine, or tsipouro or raki. Some gather seasonal fruits and vegetables, or collect mushrooms and herbs from the mountains and make home-made sweets and cheese. This fact will open seasonality and will help have tourists all year round. (Grigory, 2017)



Apart from taking part in the activities mentioned above, agricultural farms can also arrange seminars for cultivations of local products and show how to prepare Greek dishes with seasonal products. Also they can organize seminars for pottery and knitting or even shows with local dancing. Agro tourism holidays in Greece can come along with mountain sports, that involve mountain biking, hiking, bird watching or horse riding.

The model of agro tourism is already successful in Italy, especially in Tuscany and in cities in south Italy. It is popular not only to tourists from abroad, but to locals that are taking the opportunity to travel inside their country and see new places and relax during weekends. Taking that fact into account and all the positive effects that agro tourism will have on environment and economy, Greek authorities must create all the necessary conditions so as agro tourism to become more popular. On the other side, people responsible in Tourism department in Chalkidiki should take advantage of the appeal that agrotourism has, and try to adapt this model of tourism that will help them keep safe the natural resources and also bring more profits.

In order to have a sustainable development and a friendly to the environment tourism, it is vital all the parties involved to be environmental conscious and think "green". It is really important to inform the locals about the benefits that they will have if they socially, economically and personally if they adopt a more green way of lifestyle. If the locals live that way, it is easier for tourists to behave that way too, since they will try to act like local and respect the surroundings. However, in order everyone to have an ecofriendly behavior; it should be easy for them to act so. For example, recycle bins should be easy to find. They should be even found in beach, where many people visit and we have large amount of garbage. Apart from that, people should have easy access to special garbage bins that you can separate your trash, different place for metal, glass, paper. The above are some examples that if they implemented correctly will help everyone, locals and tourists to have a more environmental behavior and have a more green lifestyle in every aspect of their lives, when they work , on their free time, and even when they travel.

## 6. Conclusion

Chalkidiki is a wonderful region, with a lot of natural beauty, however as the years pass by has lost many tourists. As I have mentioned above, it is the time to consider a new strategy plan that will involve environmental management. It is very important for Chalkidiki to reevaluate its tourism product, and make the necessary corrections in order to promote a better picture. It is the right time to remind to the future visitors, the image of Chalkidiki and the natural beauties that someone will see upon his arrival there.

After careful examination, through this dissertation I found that Chalkidiki has all the necessary features so as to be one of the top tourism destinations in Greece. You can find beautiful beaches, good hotels and has all the infrastructures so as to host tourists. However, it should be taken into account that sustainable development should come first. During the creation of the strategy plan, the people in charge should take into consideration the natural resources that need to be preserved, and protect the region from degradation.

On the other side, the Ministry of Tourism in Greece should rethink and reevaluate the strategy plan for the next year and apart from designing new ways to attract more tourist, should put first the protection of the touristic areas, from pollution, from degradation, protection of natural resources that are totally connected to the touristic product. Unfortunately, the Tourism of Ministry follows a different strategy plan. The ministry continues to promote the large holiday packages, even in ecologically sensitive areas, many of them are protected under national and EU legislation. The law also approves the legalization of illegal situations, a policy that deprives the authorities from remarkable profits from the collection of the financial penalties. On the other side, the law increases the fine for free camping, a move which has as a result to gain sharp comments and extensive criticism. (Apostolopoulos, 2018)

Greek tourism should be economically advanced, and at the same time gain natural conservation and sustainable management. A new model of tourism that takes into account the ecological and financial needs of Greece, that doesn't encourage the degradation of the natural capital, will have an important role in Greek economy. Greece's unique natural resources are the country's natural capital, the kind of capital that brings in more investors. It is this capital that Greece needs to maintain and manage in a sustainable and smart way, in order to have a chance for a profitable future not just for tourism sector, but for its economy as a whole.

It's urgent now more than ever that we care for our home. Our planet's protection should become our first priority. Tourism has such a big impact on the environment that something has to be done in next years, since next generations deserve as well to enjoy the beauties of our nature.

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